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WHERE THE STAR STILL SHINES

BY WINIFRED KIRKLAND

Where the Star Still Shines

A Visit to the Yule Celebration at Old Salem

The Easter People

A Pen Picture of the Moravian Celebration of Easter

Paper Boards 50c

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Where The Star Still Shines

By

WINIFRED KIRKLAND

Author of "The Easter People," "Polly Pat's Parish," etc.

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THE MORNING STAR. [By permission.] F. F. Hagen.

1st Tune SOLO; Repeat as CHORUS.

SOLO.

B. Morn-ing Star, O cheer-ing sight! Ere Thou cam'st how dark earth's night! Je - sus

CHORUS. SOLO CHORUS.

mine, In me shine; In me shine, Je - sus mine; Fill my heart with light di - vine.

Morning Star, O cheering sight!
Ere Thou cam'st how dark earth's night!
Jesus mine, in me shine;
Fill my heart with light divine.

2 Morning Star, Thy glory bright
Far excels the sun's clear light:
Jesus be, constantly,
More than thousand suns to me.

3 Thy glad beams, Thou Morning Star,
Cheer the nations near and far;
Thee we own, Lord alone,
Man's great Saviour, God's dear Son.

4 Morning Star, my soul's true Light,
Tarry not, dispel my night;
Jesus mine, in me shine,
Fill my heart with light divine.

Johann Scheffler, 1624-77.

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THAT which is brought together in the following pages under the title, *Where the Star Still Shines,* appeared, originally, in two parts—one in the columns of *The North American Review,* the other, in those of *The Country Gentleman.* Permission to reproduce it in its present form is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

W. K.

Asheville, N. C.

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I

THE CHRISTMAS ROAD OF SALEM

I

THE CHRISTMAS ROAD OF SALEM

THE only way to visit old Salem of the old South is with a child's heart for luggage. Otherwise this old town in the middle of North Carolina may lie before your eyes actual enough, with its old streets, its old houses, its old Square, its old Home Church as its inmost core, and Salem may welcome you with the gentle, unobtrusive courtesy peculiarly its own, but unless you have learned the wisdom that knows how to put away grown-up things, you cannot really enter the Christmas city.

In Salem of all places I have ever seen, it is easiest to drop from one's shoulders the crippling pack of maturity and become once again a little child stepping along a Christmas road. Of all places it is easiest in Salem to forget the jangle of faiths and of no-faiths that have deadened our ears, to slip away from the clamor of

an age proud and fevered as ancient Rome, and to listen to the confidence of old carols ringing along moonlit dreamy streets, mysterious with the black of magnolia and of boxwood, or to hear floating down from the church belfry high up under the stars the silver melody of the ancient horns which, better than any other instruments, express the soul of the Moravian church. A most musical religion it must seem to every visitor who yields his spirit to the spirit of Moravian Salem. Not only the church liturgy but also the everyday life of the community is keyed to old tunes that date back, some of them, to the Bohemia of five centuries ago, and were familiar in Moravian households in the days when John Huss was martyred for the beauty of his faith.

There is a spell on southern Salem, the spell not of a dead past but of a living one, constantly revitalised, so that as one walks these uneven red-brick pavements, one is haunted by memories of long-past Christmases, thoughts of those far times, when in secrecy and fear, the Hidden Seed kept its feast of candles and of anthems, thoughts of happier festivals in

Saxony where young Count Zinzendorf offered the heretics the refuge city of Herrnhut, thoughts of brave long-ago love-feasts right here, when a tiny, intrepid band of colonists sang its Christmas chorales in the midst of endless miles of wilderness, while wolves nosed and howled at the cabin door. Along with these Moravian memories come thronging recollections of one's own childhood Christmases in all their unforgotten wizardry, so that here in Christmas Salem, I seem to be walking again the midnight aisle which leads through a great wood of fir trees looming black beneath high stars.

Just as at five years old, I am aware again of mystery and danger and bewilderment lurking far off in the forest, but along the Christmas roadway, there is no fear, only joy and magic, for it lies straight as a shaft of silver through the black wood, and along it troops of youngsters go dancing onward. At the instant that the children pass, each dark, bordering fir tree becomes bright with tinsel and candles, and along the spicy twigs gay little bells stir and tinkle. From time to time there come snatches of happy chants

echoed among the tall dim trunks. Since the wayfarers are children, they know that the soft, unearthly radiance upon the road before them is the long beam from a star not yet seen because it hangs so low above a stable cave, and they know, too, that their silver path is leading all child-feet toward that star. Small difference for children between that spirit-light of Bethlehem and the merry twinkle of Christmas-tree candles. For them, readily enough, their own carol-singing mingles with the voices of herald angels, and even Santa Claus, himself, all ruddy and kind, may steal to the stable door and gaze in on a divine baby. Even so is Christmas faith and Christmas fancy interwoven in old Salem, where white-headed men and women still have their Christmas trees, and still with their own hands construct beneath the green boughs, the wonderful Christmas "putzes," for while we who are visitors must retread in stumbling unfamiliarity the Christmas path, the Moravians of old Salem have always kept straight and clear within their hearts the child-road toward the star.

NORTH CAROLINA
RALEIGH, N. C.

When, a few days before Christmas, I arrived in Salem, people told me I had missed what for Moravians is always the opening key to the Yuletide season. For unnumbered years there has always been sung on the Sunday before Christmas the anthem of "The Morning Star," written in the latter seventeenth century, and set to music in the nineteenth. Although I never heard choir and congregation unite in its mighty joy, I seemed, during my two weeks' visit, always to be catching its echoes, as if the strains of Christmas minstrels had come floating back to me where, unseen in the distance, they had passed on before along the silver-lit highway, so that the words and the music of "The Morning Star" voice for me the innermost spirit of a Moravian Christmas.

The anthem has both the quaintness of old Germany and the vigourous confidence of the new world, so that the old words and the new are equally expressive of the unchanging faith of present-day Salem, while the music vibrates with the sheer child-gladness of its praise.

"Morgenstern auf finstre Nacht,
Der die Welt voll Freude macht,

Jesulein, O komm herein,
Leucht in meines Hertzens Shrein."

When in stanza two, music and words swell out into grandeur it is as if, out of the black forest mystery of life, some hidden joyous congregation suddenly pealed forth a psalm to the mounting Christmas dawn:

"Morning star, thy glory bright
Far exceeds the sun's clear light;
Jesus be, constantly,
More than thousand suns to me."

For the holiday guest there slowly emerges upon that glamorous woodland roadway of his child memories a silver-lighted city, gradually shaping into the everyday reality of actual Salem. As I look out from the window of the little gray cottage that harbours me, there become sharply etched against the mistiness of dreams the tall water-oaks of the old red-brick Square, the domes of boxwood against old walls of buff stucco or of brick, the stretching flat white rows of gravestones holly-trimmed, the white belfry of the Home Church, where in Christ-

mas week I heard little boys, high up there in the soft December sunshine, sound the trombone announcement of death. So unobtrusive and yet so sweet were those strains out of the sky, so blent with the Christmas air, that I listened to them for some time, supposing them merely carol-singing floating out from some home where the family had regathered for Christmas.

On one side the little cottage looks forth on the sunny graveyard where Moravians keep their dead too close to life for any sadness, and on the other it nestles to the prouder, taller buildings of the Square, laid out in the seventeen-sixties by founders who established Salem as the central city of their Wachovian grant of seventy thousand acres, to be built and to be kept a city meet for their faith. The solid eighteenth century houses still remain, skilfully adapted to modern usage, or unobtrusively altered. Half of Salem traces its ancestry back to those earlier days, and all of Salem keeps alive, both in family life and in public, the traditions and the customs of its unforgotten builders.

Perhaps it is only in our own South that so gentle and half-romantic a faith could have found so gracious a flowering as is typified in the Easter and the Christmas customs of this Salem of North Carolina. There is a blending of native warmth and glow and kindliness in the spirit of this Southern Province of the Moravian Church. The first colonists came seeking a mild climate and friendly neighbours, and found both. For a hundred and fifty years Salem has been true to its first purpose. Long ago it was a little refuge city of peace in the wilderness, and still, today, it offers its benediction for all who seek to penetrate beyond the mere externals of a locality into the inner sanctities of tradition.

Long ago a brave little band kept to their secure daily round of work and worship amid perils of Indian attack and the backwash of Continental armies, and freely gave their hospitality to everyone that asked it, and today the mind of those first settlers still dominates and moulds the life of the city. Yesterday and now the people of Salem have possessed both the art of shrewd adjustment

to the contemporary and the power to withdraw from all its fever and conflict into the peace of a child-faith. With quaint literalness those early founders looked upon themselves as all members of one family, and today one of the strongest impressions of any visitor is that of a great household, close-bound in sympathy, and all turning toward the old Home Church as to a central hearthside, while up and down the worn old streets there moves the form of one still young at eighty, who in himself is host and shepherd and father of all the city.

One wonders if the inhabitants of Salem fully realise their high privilege of living in a community which both expresses their religion and preserves the finest traditions of their ancestors. In these bewildering days it is the lot of most idealists to live in a solitude, unable, amid the surrounding mists, to distinguish the shapes of their fellow believers. But in Salem people have the sacred advantage of dwelling with those who constantly share and reinforce each other's faith as naturally as they have shared each other's childhood and each other's memories of

the old Infant School. Probably Moravians do not dream with what strange nostalgia a visitor listens to persons who treat God conversationally, who talk of Him as spontaneously as a little boy speaks of that splendid comrade he calls Daddy. Normally enough, naturally enough, has the Moravian spirit been able to strike deep roots in our own South, for in our South religion is still a custom unquestioned, and leisure can still be found for an obsolete, old-world culture, and intellect still bows in reverence before the soul. In old Salem of the old South there can be no blur upon the radiant confidence of the Christmas story, no smirch upon the silver purity of that far-lit path toward Bethlehem's cave.

In Salem I feel myself to be sometimes in Cranford, sometimes in Barchester, while all reminiscence of those two familiar home-towns of the fancy is touched by an atmosphere sacred to Salem. From one window of my room I can gaze up the long, silent avenue, forbidden to all vehicles, that skirts the high ivy-hung picket fence of the graveyard. Even in December the graveyard grass is vivid in

the sunshine. I am so near that I can almost see the crimson berries of the holly wreaths laid on the little flat marble slabs. Cedar Avenue lies as a white path at the heart of Salem. On one side of it are gateways whose sunny arches, blazoned with texts of hope, stand bright against the shadowy spruce and cedar massed beyond the triumphant marching lines of the little gravestones. Along Cedar Avenue I have watched a funeral procession move with confident tread, while the trombone strains floated forth delicate and clear upon the New Year's morning.

Another window of my room looks toward the old Square, toward the Bishop's home beside the Bishop's church, toward the aging buildings that still bear names witnessing to the deep Moravian reverence for the family as a holy entity, —the Sisters' House, the House of the Single Brethren, the Widows' House. In the cavernous cellar of the most venerable of all these buildings I was shown, one afternoon, the mysteries of the Christmas candle-making. In those great, white-washed catacombs one peers into dark, haunted corridors through wall

arches three feet deep. The floor has the stone flagging that was laid a hundred and fifty years ago. In the long kitchen of the Single Brethren the great, hooded fireplace with its built-in Dutch oven stands intact.

Here, in precisely the same moulds and with precisely the same methods through unbroken generations, have been made the famous Christmas candles of Salem. The moulds hold, some of them, six candles, some a dozen. Into the manufacture last year went two hundred pounds of beeswax and fifty pounds of tallow. From the first melting to the final polishing each candle requires an elaborate process of handwork. It took two women six weeks to make the candles, achieving, as they did, six thousand five hundred of the slender wisps of green wax familiar to everyone who has ever known a Salem Christmas. The decorating of the candles, as well as the dipping, is a matter of far tradition. According to methods of cutting and of pasting long in use, each candle is encircled by an outstanding fringe of scarlet paper before it is at last stuck in its hole in one of the long trays

and borne off to be kept for the love-feast of Christmas Eve. To visitors and to Moravians alike the preparation of the candles is symbolic; when Salem trusts to alien hands the making and the decorating of its Christmas candles, Salem will not be Salem any more.

A simple, vital reverence for tradition is as characteristic of each individual home as it is of the larger home life of the church congregation. In the tiny cottage that offers me hospitality there is a little wooden rocking chair carefully treasured. One turns it up to find on the bottom, in a handwriting too alive ever to be forgotten, these words, "This rocker was used by mother to rock all her nine babies to sleep from 1828-1844. Keep it in the family." There lies on this little chair a touch of that personal, homey immortality that the home-going dead must value,—and yet it is only a little wooden rocker, tawny drab, and finely lined like an old parchment—or an old face. It has no arms, therefore had no bumps for little heads. It has spreading legs and rockers, and on each rocker is painted a bunch of fading wild roses.

All the little home is gentle with old memories. Each morning at the close of breakfast I listen first to the daily reading from the Moravian Text-book for the year, the custom of the Text-book dating back to Count Zinzendorf, and after the Text-book comes the reading from birthday and memory books. As I listen, a kindly past made up of small family events becomes vital for me, the guest. Yet the little cottage is alive to the present as well as to the past. The neighbour children blow in and out all ruddy with ball-playing. The Moravian is a children's church, its services crowded with jolly youngsters, seated as happily beside their parents as seedlings grow around a tree. To Moravian children the story of a children's Friend is no dead tale. The rosy seven-year-old Harold who comes flying so often to our door has a hearty affection for Santa Claus, but with that Other he is even more familiar. A few weeks before this last Christmas a little playmate died. Harold was puzzled by the sorrow of the grown-ups and protested, "But Louise has gone to Jesus, and she will be there for His birthday."

II

THE CHRISTMAS PUTZES

II

THE CHRISTMAS PUTZES

THE child-spirit of old Salem is strangely contagious. For the visitor, along with the mysterious quickening to life of his buried childhood, holy things become homely, and homely things become holy. The Christmas road of Salem, for all its sacredness, is bordered by glistening Christmas trees, and haunted by gentle old-world fancies from a Germany of long ago. Everyone, no matter how aged, has a Christmas tree and every Christmas tree has its "putz," the word used to describe the decoration, most elaborate and painstaking, of the table or platform on which the tree stands. Some of the Christmas trees that I saw, remain in my memory vivid with the individuality of their treatment. The putz is built and arranged to show a world in miniature, a world most real but small enough for elves to inhabit. No mechanism is too tiny or too intricate for skilled

fingers to perfect. I saw one house a foot high, a most luxuriously furnished mansion, on which one father had toiled happily for eighteen months. The foundation of the putz is usually gray-green southern moss, in which are laid out valleys and mountains, grottoes and caves. A favourite device is a mill, seven or eight inches high, which really grinds real meal.

One putz that I saw transported me straight back to the Germany of old fairy tales. It had a parapeted castle of sand paper, and in the castle grounds a ten-inch fountain tossed its recurrent jet of water, and from it a stream meandered in a curving green trough cunningly hidden. On it ducks paddled and boats floated. Men fished from a bridge. This putz was arranged with a clever eye to perspective, and was full of details surprising and fascinating, diminutive chalets clinging to gorges, tiny antlered deer taking refuge in a thicket from the huntsman and dogs, a wee, secret spring hung with ferns, cottages busy with every activity, wood-chopping, washing, cooking. There were cows in the fields, sheep upon the hills. The sheep had been made by

one of the oldest of the "single sisters," one tied to her chair with rheumatism, but delighting each year to make sheep for the putzes, moulding them first out of clay, then covering them with wool, and last painting them so that every feature, nose, mouth, eye, ear, is lifelike, sheep four inches long, wearing bells hung around their necks on bright Christmas ribbon.

No family's putz is ever exactly alike on two successive Christmases, although separate objects in the decorations may appear year after year. I saw one sturdy hand-made house, less than a foot in dimensions, which has served four generations in the same family. One of the most beautiful Christmas trees I saw was beautiful in significance only, for it had no ornaments and no putz. The eighty-year-old grandmother called it her "Goodwill tree," for its sole trimming was Christmas cards fluttering from every green twig, and bearing their goodwill messages from all over the world. Although weighted with years, this grandmother is still quick-eyed, quick-hearted. She has been a famous maker of putzes, but now all her Christ-

mas decorations have been divided among the households of her sons, men all active now in the life of church and city.

Here, beside the "Goodwill tree," I heard tale after tale of the past life of Salem, heard of the old sister, who, living in the community of the Sisters' House, used to steal down to the big kitchen after the rest were in bed, and gather all the scraps into her capacious apron; then she would open the door and softly call all the stray cats and dogs of the neighbourhood to a midnight feast; and I heard of the gentle old man, who, coming to spend his last years in the shelter of the "Gemein Haus" of Salem, preferred that people call him not by his real name, Wolf, but address him always as Mr. Schaf; and then, unforgettably, I heard of "little Betsey." Of all the kindly dead who still people the chat of old Salem, "little Betsey" stands out vividest in my memory. She lived to her seventies, and she has been seventy years dead, and yet of the many who as children knew her, not one of them ever speaks of her except as "little Betsey." A tiny woman, they have told me, always petted and shielded by

two efficient elder sisters, and, so it would seem, by everybody else as well.

Little Betsey had been from three years old stone-deaf. She spoke all her life the German baby talk she had used when scarlet fever closed her ears forever. But this is not all, she kept until death the fancies she had at three, she believed always that angels carried a dead body straight from the grave to heaven. "No," people would assure me, "little Betsey was not queer, or lacking; little Betsey was as bright as anybody, it was just that after she was deaf people never told her sad things, so she stayed a child always." Bowed, old people have told me how they remember little Betsey, a tiny old woman, radiantly happy to be useful, coming to help them, when they were wee things, to lift the heavy mugs at the children's Christmas love-feasts of long, long ago.

There, by the "Goodwill tree" I saw and handled some of little Betsey's toys, which she had cherished to the end. There are two tiny carafes with infinitesimal stoppers, and a wee fluted goblet, all three only an inch and a half high, but beautiful in shape, slender bits of thin-

nest crystal brushed with gold. With the tiny doll and bed two inches long, little Betsey used to make every Christmas a manger scene. The doll is all of wax, and wears a little straight dress tied with a sash, the short black hair is demurely parted, the little red painted slippers are undimmed. You can hold little Betsey's toys in the palm of one hand, but far better than if they were larger, they have a spell to bring back the child heart that loved them. I can picture the joy with which she fashioned a manger out of this little bed of faded pink silk. Words of a poem I have read somewhere come back to me, spoken by the Madonna to the little baby on her lap,

> "I have grown wise with littleness,
> The Lord of Life is king of prettiness."

I wonder if anywhere but in Salem there could have lived a little Betsey. I wonder if anywhere but in this city founded on faith in a Child, people would have so tenderly conspired to protect a stricken woman from the sadness of growing up.

There is in Salem an old star-maker.

He has showed me his stars and explained their manufacture. The rays are made of many long slim cones of white paper, the whole illumined by a concealed electric bulb. The star-maker is eighty-seven and still goes every day to his desk in a business office. In off hours he makes his stars and built his putz. He lives in a little fading brick house, which, hidden by boxwood and ivy, looks like a Christmas card.

Above the old doorway shines one of his white-rayed stars. Together he and his daughter trimmed their Christmas tree and made their putz. The putz represented a tiny forest hamlet in the old legendary fatherland. Little lighted houses looked out from shadowy green. Every wee shingle on the steep roofs had been carefully whittled. A little church out of some fairy tale showed ruddy windows and pushed its steeple up into the overhanging spruce twigs. Elfin footpaths climbed tiny hills. The star-maker had recaptured old, old child-dreams to make his putz. While I gazed at it, caught back myself to a childhood road all magic with lights and haunted shad-

ows, I happened suddenly to look up, out of the window. There in strange juxtaposition to the enchanted elf-world of the Christmas putz, an airplane went sailing beyond the high, bare branches.

But it was not an old man who built the most magical of all the Christmas putzes, that one which of all my memories of the Christmas city, will always be the most poignant and the most significant, a memory deeper, sharper than the solemn beauty of the Christmas-Eve love-feasts or the profound reverence of the memorabilia service of the New Year. Dreamily I shall always recall the magical pathway of Christmas week,—every morning I woke to a world misted by silvery fog and brushed by gleaming frost; soft blue haze wrapped the farther trees, haze soon burned away by the mild December sun; just outside my window on Christmas morning, a cardinal, flashing bright from a silver-misted tree, shrilled out a carol. But these things were of the daylight and may fade, while another picture grows only sharper.

It is a commonplace to say that the faith that built cathedrals is gone, that

the ecstasy of confidence in which mediæval architects conceived the Gothic arch, and masons carved angel faces on stones is perished from the earth, but in Salem I saw the Christmas road to Bethlehem constructed, immortally fresh and real, out of mere paper and pasteboard and boxes. It is not necessary in order to conceive a dream and give it concrete expression, that a man be himself a dreamer or a poet. The man who made for his two children the most beautiful Christmas putz in Salem, is a practical and prosperous young business man. With wholly instinctive skill in perspective, in colour and lighting, above all in subjection of every detail to one central idea, he had built on a low platform a picture which held everyone absolutely silent. People might enter the room full of Christmas bustle and chatter, but in a few moments there would be utter stillness. "I made it," the artist told me, "from an old Bible picture, and from my thoughts."

Every evening during my two weeks in Salem I crossed the street to visit that softly lighted scene of Bethlehem. To the right the Christmas tree towered to

the ceiling, but it was merely symbolic of Christmas cheer and fancy, standing all in shadow except as the rays of the star glistened on spruce twig and tinsel. In the dusk below the tree, sheep glimmered, and in the shadow at the back, far away in the distance, there rose the cone of a snowy mountain. To the left of the tree a huddled Oriental village went climbing. The dim walls had tiny slits of windows, ruddy in the near perspective, fading to white and then to darkness beyond. Slowly and mysteriously as one looked, shapes of men and of animals came to life out of the gloom. All the wall of the room was covered with dark blue paper on which gleamed silver stars forming the constellations. The light came from two spots only, the upper one the diffused radiance, pure white, from a single star hung from the ceiling, and the lower, the ruddy outpouring from a stable cave below the farthest walls of the shadowy, climbing town.

All the rosy glow from the cave was concentrated within on a tiny naked baby wearing a shining diadem. The figures of the Nativity scene had been bought

from a Syrian art dealer and were extraordinarily lifelike. Over the baby's form Mary bent, blue-robed, and Joseph stood near by. Ass and ox gazed wonderingly at the bright manger. In the doorway of the cave knelt the first of the three wise men, a turbanned, robed figure, holding out his gift of gold. Below on the slope of the hill, all in the streaming light from the cave there came an Oriental shepherd, one of his sheep tied by its feet around his neck. Other sheep and other shepherds were discernible on the far hill beyond the town. Slowly as one looked there came looming out of the dusk to the right of the cave, nearer the tree, the shapes of three camels, much larger in scale than any of the other animals, because realistically nearer in perspective. Beside their camels stepped the richly robed figures of the other two wise men.

The effect of the lighting was magical. Beneath the star the shadows on the flat roofs were ink-black, mysterious with a sense of the crowded Oriental life beneath. It seemed incredible that all Bethlehem could lie so heavily asleep with this miracle of sky and cave to be seen for the

mere opening of holden eyes. Yet while all Royal David's city lay unmindful, having turned away a king, a wise man from afar was kneeling at the shining stable door, motionless in an ecstasy of worship. In all that scene the only people who were aware were shepherds, untaught men schooled to faith by watching the nightly pageantry of the sky, and scholars, men made humble by long study of the luminous mystery of the constellations. In the quiet hour before the year's end, I sat gazing at this newly made scene of Bethlehem. In delicate etching of utter grace the branches of the Christmas tree were thrown in shadow upon the deep blue wall. The light from the tiny cave shone forth in steadfast glory. Curiously summoned both the shepherds and the seers had set out on a road heavy with dangers, bordered on either side by black mystery, and at the end they had found, —so said the faith that had constructed this Christmas putz in old Salem—at the end of their road they had found a shining Child and an unquenchable Star.

III

THE CHILDREN'S LOVE-FEAST

THE STAR-MAKER'S HOUSE

III

THE CHILDREN'S LOVE-FEAST

THE star-faith of Salem is today no dying creed, but an imperishable growth in the hearts of young men. Both in the life of each home and in the larger life of church and community, one has constantly the sense of a past neither decayed nor decadent, being entrusted to younger hands that are vigorous and willing. One seems to witness the very act of a sacramental transmission, the faith of one great united family being handed down to its sons. In the big house next to our cottage I saw on Christmas Eve the table spread for a family party of thirty-two. There was the cushioned seat for the grandmother at the head, and the high chairs for the smallest grandchildren. Down through the centre amid the heaped holly and carnations extended a long green board holding eighty blazing candles, the long frame having been origi-

nally made for the Bishop's birthday, and now borrowed in Salem's characteristic neighbourly fashion. Yet it was not the Yuletide glow of the stretching Christmas table that will longest remain in my memory, but the chanted grace I heard later from my window, a grace composed by the English John Cennick nearly two hundred years ago:

"Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored,
From thy all bounteous hand, our food
May we receive with gratitude.

"We humbly thank thee, Lord, our God,
For all thy gifts on us bestowed;
And pray thee graciously to grant
The food which day by day we want."

More impressive than the rich harmony of men's voices ringing out upon the starlit evening was their utter reverence, and these, it must be emphasized, are the voices of young men, young bankers, young merchants and lawyers of that Twin City, which is made up of two united towns, one new, one old, named on the maps Winston-Salem. These are the torch-bearers whose first memory of their

faith is as toddlers brought to the Children's Christmas Eve Love-feast. These are the young fathers who now bring their own toddlers to hear the Bishop tell once again to children, as for forty-five years he has been telling it, the child story of a star.

There are persons who walk the Christmas-lighted path through earth's black mystery not on one day of the year only, but on all the days of all the years. The magi were subtle students, keen men and free-minded, rich with the long-inherited treasures of the intellect. It was their science, not their superstition, that revealed to them the birth of a new light in the heavens. Bishop Rondthaler's eyes are a seer's eyes, clear blue lanterns at eighty. His face is of the type transmitted only through long generations of the finely educated. There is not a child in Salem who does not know Bishop Rondthaler's smile, Bishop Rondthaler's voice. How many times he must have sung that old glad anthem, which each year on its appointed Sunday rings out upon the Christmas road of Salem,

Morning Star, my soul's true Light,
Tarry not, dispel my night;
Jesus mine, in me shine,
Fill my heart with light divine.

The Moravian is a children's church by no accident, but by long conviction, as the Bishop himself once explained to me. When in the early eighteenth century, the ancient Unitas Fratrum of Bohemia experienced its great revival at Herrnhut under the protection of young Count Zinzendorf, there suddenly occurred, as it appears, quite spontaneously, a great wave of religious enthusiasm among the children. The quaint touching account comes down to us in the words of ten-year-old diarists. Ever since that time, says the Bishop, "Our reverence for childhood has been founded on the belief that a child can be as good a Christian as a grown-up,—and perhaps a little better." In Salem the Children's Christmas Eve Love-feast, and the Children's Memorabilia service at New Year's, are made fully as important as the corresponding celebrations for adults.

The Children's Love-feast of Christmas Eve is a custom as old as Salem, and

older. More than a hundred and fifty years ago when Wachovia was still a forest wilderness, dark with perils of wolves and bears and hostile Indians, the Moravian "brethren" of the little settlements of Bethabara and Bethania welcomed to the children's love-feasts not only their own children, but those of their neighbours. The old records come down to us all bright and warm with Christmas hospitality. In the diary of the Bethabara congregation of December, 1760, one reads:

"On the 5th it was reported that the Indians were killing again on the Catawba. Br. Ettwein had a talk with a Tuscarora. On Christmas Day the English children from the mill came to see our Christmas decoration, they were so poorly clad that it would have moved a stone to pity. We told them why we rejoiced like children and gave to each a piece of cake. In Bethania Br. Ettwein held a Love-feast for the 24 children there, at the close of the service each received a pretty Christmas verse and a ginger cake, the first they had ever seen."

In 1761, one first reads of the giving

of lighted tapers, that custom never yet broken. In the account written December 24, 1770, one can still hear those far-off carols, still see the twinkle of candles held high by youngsters dancing homeward along the dark wood paths: "At 6 P. M. a Love-feast was held for the children, appropriate hymns were sung, and small lighted candles were distributed, which they joyfully carried home, still burning."

As those first settler children must have come all eager to those long-ago celebrations of their Moravian neighbours, so today the Christmas Eve crowd is composed as much of non-Moravians as of church members, all flocking to the old Home Church of their city. For half an hour before the doors could be opened, while the sunshine of the late afternoon poured over us, I waited with a happy throng, fathers and mothers and grandparents, and youngsters of every age from one year to twelve. As soon as the doors admitted us, the wide arc of each pew was instantly filled, but the little low heads were not all visible except as they popped up to peer around, little brown

or blonde heads, bobbed or meticulously curled. The church hummed with little voices. Now and then a baby protested sharply against being repressed by some solicitous mother, but for the most part all the noise was happy. The long window which showed children crowding to Jesus's welcome was still clear in the afternoon light, which as the service proceeded, dimmed to shadowy evening. All the Christmas decoration focussed the eye upon the picture above the choir platform, which extends across the front of the church. In a deep green frame of shining laurel and spruce there shines out each year the same ruddy illumination of Correggio's Nativity. On each Christmas Eve every child in the congregation looks up to see, all bathed in glowing light, a mother bending above the Christ-baby in His stable.

As if it had been quaint homey incense, the aroma of the love-feast coffee is fragrant through the church. There is rustling, there is chatter of children, and yet also there is the restraint of a great reverence. Then a hush, and everyone is listening. Somewhere high and far away

there is music, silvery announcement from the sky. Grown-up hands touch the little ones to quiet, that all may hear. It is the trombone players in the belfry, but how easily it might have been the herald angels! Soft at first, then in growing volume the organ takes up and continues those strains from overhead. The service moves on all musically, old carols, jubilant anthems, but because it is a children's service in a children's church it is brief and simple.

It is not long before the two doors at the right beneath the gallery swing open, and a reverent procession of women all in white enters, bearing the baskets of love-feast buns. There follows a line of men carrying great wooden trays of the straight white mugs of love-feast coffee. Quietly as in some happy sacrament, each child is given his bun and mug. Seated in front, close to them, sharing their love-feast meal, the Bishop looks forth on his children. Gently his voice breaks upon the rustling and the subdued chatter of little lips: "Fathers and mothers who at this moment are guiding a child's hand, as he eats his love-feast, one too young to

know what he is doing, pray each one of you that at this instant Jesus Himself may come and be near your little child with His Christmas blessing."

When the bun is eaten, the coffee drunk, and the mugs collected and taken away by the silent procession, the Bishop rises. The church is growing dark with the stealing shadows of twilight. Never has the Bishop's telling of the old story been twice the same. To him it is forever new. He speaks on the brief text, "Yet for our sakes He became poor." The babbling of little tongues grows still. Young eyes grow wide looking into the Bishop's. In words instinctively pictorial he tells us there was once in heaven a marvellous house, golden and splendid, where Jesus lived with His Father, surrounded by love and tenderness and beauty beyond any telling. Outside of this house were stately trees, and lovely flowers, and darting birds of rainbow colours. All about Jesus in His house were angels more than you could count, and these angels asked only one thing, to serve Him. To wait on Jesus was the sole wish of all these regiments of

angels in this beautiful house in heaven. Yet all this love and all this royal splendour Jesus left, that He might come a little baby, too poor to have a cradle, a baby born in a stable, laid to sleep among the cattle. He came to us, all poor, to see whether we would love Him for Himself alone, without any riches of money or of power. And still today, as He lies there, a little baby in a stable, He is asking, "Children, will you love Me for Myself alone?" And if we do love Him for Himself, remembering how He loved us enough to leave His splendid home to come to us, if we love Him and try, each child of us here in this church today, to please Him, then some day He will take us home, to live with Him in His beautiful house in heaven, forever.

Gently the twilight wraps us in darkness, more carols ring through the old church, then on each side of the organ in front of us, a door opens and two women in white appear, the van of a procession which moves down the platform steps and through the aisles. Each woman carries a lighted candle, and each pair is followed by a man bearing a great tray of blazing

tapers. The women distribute the candles, one to every child in the congregation. The giving of the candles closes the service. Theirs is the only light in the darkness as we rise for the Bishop's blessing, and then afterward pour out beneath the old hooded doorway into the starlit Christmas Eve. Looking back one sees still faintly discernible the figures in that high window which against the outdoor darkness reveals Jesus blessing little children.

IV

THE CANDLES AND THE STAR

IV

THE CANDLES AND THE STAR

AS in the afternoon, the children come to receive their Christmas candles, so, a few hours later, the grown-ups gather in their turn, for their reverent Christmas Love-feast. Except for its deeper solemnity, the evening love-feast is a repetition of that of the afternoon. The crowded church is a body of men and women assembled once more to gaze with the Bishop at that shining picture of the Nativity. Again there floats down upon the hushed congregation the faint, silver music from the belfry, sacred minstrelsy sounding out of the darkness to be taken up by the confident organ. As the congregation rises, the whole building resounds with the joy of the anthem, and when this dies away, the Bishop's quiet voice asks us to continue standing while he reads Luke's account of that long-ago night in Bethlehem. There

in the old Home Church of old Salem, the story of the first Christmas becomes instinct with a mystical reality.

Later in the service, which, like all ritual of the Moravian church, consists far more of praise than of prayer, the Bishop speaks to us of that undying narrative, and as his steadfast belief leads us, children following his eighty-year-old guidance, back to that holy birthplace of his faith, it is as if we trod once again a silver pathway bright against all gloom, all doubt, while sturdy shepherds and glistening angels come thrusting aside the darkness to companion us along the road to Bethlehem.

The Bishop reminds us that a great literary critic once pronounced Luke's Gospel the most beautiful book in the world. Of this book the second chapter is the most beautiful of all. Thoughtful readers of it must remember always that Luke was a Greek doctor, highly educated, scientific in dealing with his sources. He was Paul's physician, and Paul was after his conversion the familiar friend of the apostles in Jerusalem, undoubtedly the friend of John, at whose

home Mary lived. We may well believe, therefore, that the story of Christ's birth, as we have it in Luke's Gospel, is this mother's story, coming down to us how near, how quick and alive! Between us and Mary's own voice telling it, only two people, Paul, who transmitted the account, Luke, who wrote it down! The Bishop points out how tender and how holy is the chronicle with details only Jesus's mother could have known. As the most sacred thing in our physical life is the relation of a human mother to her human child, so it is most fitting that the story of the birth of a divine Child should be a record from a mother's lips of mother-love.

Beneath the illumined scene of that nativity which focusses forever all Christmas worship on the holiness of a family group, we eat the Christmas love-feast that symbolises by our sharing of food and drink together our close-knit membership in one great family. In utter quiet, in utter reverence, the procession of white-clad girls and women moves slowly down the aisles distributing to every one present the love-feast buns.

According to custom each one of us wraps our bun in a tiny napkin brought for the purpose. On one corner of the napkin is embroidered a cross. Then at the entrance of the men with the great laden trays, the high white mugs of coffee are passed from hand to hand along the wide-curving pews. The solemn hush is gently broken by the Bishop's words pointing out our unconscious courtesy, courtesy which is like Christ's own, he believes, and which cements for this holy hour the intimacy of our kinship. He asks us, while we wait, to sing, "Blest be the tie that binds—" According to old custom the Bishop has been the first served, seated by the communion table, close to his people, as always, and wearing, as always, merely the ordinary dress of his fellow-worshippers. When every one has been served, then Bishop and congregation together, eat the love-feast bun, drink the love-feast coffee, while the organ peals forth its Christmas joy.

Musically the service passes on to the candle-giving. All the church is darkened. As in the afternoon, to right and left of the organ, in front of us, doors

open, and two by two the white-dressed women, holding each her burning candle, and the men carrying the long trays that blaze with light, enter and pass down all aisles and through the curving gallery. Beginning with the Bishop, they give to everyone in the church a lighted taper, slim, green, girdled with its frill of crimson paper. Briefly the Bishop explains the meaning of the Moravian Christmas candles. "As Jesus came that He might be a shining light for us in a black world, so let each of us bear a light for Him."

When everyone has received a candle, the procession moves back up the converging aisles, remounts the steps of the platform, but does not pass out. All the middle space in front of the organ is a screen of spruce and holly and dark glistening laurel, from the centre of which the Nativity scene glows just above the Bishop's head, as he stands facing us, his figure discernible only by the light of the taper in his hand. In front of the choir doors, to right and left, are grouped the women all in white except for a sprig of holly on the breast. Behind them stand the men, on whose trays is still left a mass

of blazing candles rosy-trimmed. In the gallery and in the body of the church, people have become invisible in the dark, but the curve of every pew above and below is outlined by a shining row of tapers against the blackness. All in silence we have risen. The Bishop speaks, "Let each of us at this instant lift high his candle, so that Jesus from heaven may look down and see the shining of our light for Him." Then as we stand, each holding high his tiny gleaming taper, the Bishop's voice, melodious from out the engulfing shadows, leads us all as we sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

As we leave the church, the moonlight is pouring down on the old roofs, the old streets. Cedar Avenue lies like a shaft of silver beyond the church door. Shadows of bare trees are etched black on the worn pavements. Moonlight gistens on the ivy walls, on the long leaves of the magnolia trees, on the towering domes of boxwood. Little streets and old alleys opening on the Square are black tunnels of mystery. The high tracery of the water oaks is delicately clear against a sky flooded with

silver. Salem lies as still beneath the Christmas moon as if it were a city in some old-world legend. In the hush there goes still ringing sweet within one's mind the music of ancient trumpets from the sky, the melody of a clear voice, reading a mystical story. Today's rushing progress seems as far away as the clangor of the trolley on the next street.

If on one long-ago December night some Roman traveller posting from city to city on a tour through ancient Palestine, had stopped, puzzled, to investigate a strange light coming from a stable cave on the outskirts of a little hill town, and if as he approached that light, the sky above his head had suddenly been riven by angels singing of a new-born god, how afterward when he went back to that bustling, imperial centre of the world would he have related that portentous incident of his journeyings? In what words comprehensible to that proud, fevered Rome of Augustus Cæsar could a Roman traveller have translated his impressions of a far away little village, made holy by faith, a far away little village lying in peace beneath a silver-flooded Christmas

sky? Would such a traveller, as the crowded, noisy years went on, cease trying to explain to anyone that strange vision, even while in his heart the picture of that midnight village grew always more vivid, and more arresting?

To one traveller turned aside last Christmas-time from the clamorous streets of today, to walk for a little while the Christmas road through old Salem, the memory of the Christmas city grows ever more significant, more challenging. The glory of imperial Rome has faded into darkness, but does the road to Bethlehem still lie silver-clear, beckoning to wise men? As long as little children shall be born, shall there be reborn each Christmas the faith in a God who became a baby? Ringing through midnight streets, echoed among the black overshadowing branches of mystery shall there sound forever, as always at Christmas time in old Salem, the praise of a great light?

> "Thy glad beams, Thou morning Star,
> Cheer the nations near and far;
> Thee we own, Lord alone,
> Man's great Saviour, God's dear Son."

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